

#237: JULY 2018 • INDYPENDENT.ORG

# THE INDYPENDENT

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SABOTAGE**  
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**SHADY DEAL IN  
CROWN HEIGHTS**  
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## YOUR DATA IS OUT THERE

**FACEBOOK IS USING OUR PERSONAL INFO TO  
MANIPULATE US. CAN WE STOP IT?**  
PETER RUGH, P10







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# COMMUNITY CALENDAR



**JULY 5–JULY 19**  
THUs, times vary • \$16  
**PERFORMANCE: CUER-  
PXS RADICALES: RADI-  
CAL BODIES IN PERFOR-  
MANCE**  
Immerse yourself in new  
and recent work by con-  
temporary Latinx artists  
as they respond to themes  
in the exhibition “Radical  
Women: Latin American  
Art, 1960–1985” on view  
until July 22. Featuring  
performance, visual art,  
literature, music, and  
everything in between,  
it centers a younger  
generation engaging with  
our current political and  
cultural landscape.  
**BROOKLYN MUSEUM**  
200 Eastern Pkwy, Bklyn

**JULY 7–JULY 8**  
9AM–5PM SAT & SUN •  
\$25 Suggested donation  
**CONFERENCE: CRASH  
COURSE IN WORKPLACE  
ORGANIZING**  
Want to build a union in  
your workplace, but not  
sure where to start? This  
two-day training is for  
you. Through participatory  
activities, attendees gain  
an understanding of the  
stages of an organizing  
campaign and mastery of  
foundational organizing  
skills.  
**THE NEW SCHOOL**  
66 W. 12th St., Mnhtn

**SAT JULY 7**  
10AM–4PM • FREE  
**FEST: 16TH ANNUAL**

**ARAB STREET FESTIVAL**  
Food, musical performanc-  
es and art celebrating the  
Arab-American and North  
African cultural heritage.  
*Great Jones St., Mnhtn*

**SAT JULY 7**  
5PM–10 PM • FREE  
**ART: FIRST SATURDAY  
AT BROOKLYN MUSEUM:  
REIMAGINING INDEPEN-  
DENCE**  
Celebrate the voices of  
immigrant and diasporic  
communities, artists  
and activists working to  
reimagine independence  
for their communities.  
Popup gallery talks, per-  
formances, music, drinks  
and more.  
**BROOKLYN MUSEUM**  
200 Eastern Pkwy, Bklyn

**MON JULY 9**  
8:30PM–9:30PM  
**PERFORMANCE: AZU-  
CAR!**  
A variety show featuring  
Latinx and Hispanic talent  
— stand-up, storytelling,  
characters, improv, music.  
**STARR BAR**  
214 Starr St., Mnhtn

**JULY 11–AUG 29**  
WEDs 7PM • FREE  
**FILM: OUTDOOR CINEMA**  
Curated by Film Forum and  
Rooftop Films, the inter-  
national festival highlights  
Socrates Sculpture Park  
as a community space for  
the many cultures that  
share one of the world's  
most diverse places — the

borough of Queens. This  
July, in order of screening:  
Monsoon Wedding, Black  
Mother, The Young Girls of  
Rocheport.  
**SOCRATES SCULPTURE  
PARK**  
32-01 Vernon Blvd, Queens

**THU JULY 12**  
7PM–8:30PM • \$15  
**PANEL: LEGACIES OF THE  
BLACK AUDIO FILM COL-  
LECTIVE**  
A discussion on the rel-  
evance of the Black Audio  
Film Collective whose  
lyrical, essayistic films  
brought together archival  
footage and drew upon  
the work of postcolonial  
writers, feminist intellec-  
tuals and queer theorists  
to reckon with radically  
shifting social and political  
conditions in Britain and  
the United States through-  
out much of the 1980s and  
'90s.  
**NEW MUSEUM**  
235 Bowery, Mnhtn

**THU JULY 12**  
7PM–9PM  
**SCIENCE: MANHATTAN-  
HENGE**  
As the Sun sets on July  
12, it will be perfectly  
aligned with Manhattan's  
east-west numbered  
streets. Astrophysicist  
Jackie Faherty will be your  
guide to the history and  
astronomy behind this fas-  
cinating phenomenon in a  
special presentation at the  
Hayden Planetarium.

**AMERICAN MUSEUM OF  
NATURAL HISTORY**  
200 Central Park W., Mnhtn

**SUN JULY 15**  
2:30PM–5PM  
**POETRY: BARG DAY**  
Poets and musicians pay  
tribute Barbara Barg.  
Barg was a pre-Socratic,  
post- postmodern, pre-  
apocalyptic poet and  
through these lenses  
explored writing, music,  
performance, teaching,  
the ground, the sky and life  
in general.  
**BOWERY POETRY CLUB**  
308 Bowery, Bklyn

**TUE JULY 17**  
6:30PM–8PM • \$10  
**TALK: DISMANTLING THE  
GAZE: A VISUAL PRIMER**  
This program launches  
ICP's new series, "Dis-  
mantling the Gaze," which  
considers looking, power  
and visual culture in the  
#MeToo moment. Art  
historian and popular cul-  
ture scholar Maria Elena  
Buszek presents hundreds  
of years of visual culture in  
one brief presentation that  
concisely illustrates the  
gendered power struc-  
tures deeply embedded in  
cultural production.  
**ICP MUSEUM**  
250 Bowery, Mnhtn

**TUE JULY 17**  
6:30PM–8:30PM • \$10  
**PERFORMANCE: PRO-  
FILED**  
A space for people to

share their horrible experi-  
ences of racial profiling  
with some humor and for  
the audience to learn.  
Hosted by Marcela On-  
yango & Lauren Clark  
**CAVEAT**  
21A Clinton St., Mnhtn

**THU JULY 19**  
7PM–8:30PM • \$15  
**ART: SOCIAL FABRIC:  
THOMAS BAYRLE'S EX-  
PANDED NETWORK**  
Organized in conjunction  
with the exhibit “Thomas  
Bayrle: Playtime” at the  
New Museum until Sept.  
2, this panel will look at  
how younger voices take  
up questions around  
corporate production,  
political spectacle, digital  
technology and urban  
planning in their work.  
Bayrle is one of the most  
important artists to have  
emerged during the West  
German economic boom  
in the 1960s. His thematic  
investigations have ranged  
from a visual analysis of  
mass culture and consum-  
erism to reflections on  
how technology impacts  
global politics.  
**NEW MUSEUM**  
235 Bowery, Mnhtn

**THU JULY 19**  
7PM–9PM • \$5–\$15 sug-  
gested donations  
**HISTORY: HOMEWARD  
BOUND: MEMORIES,  
IDENTITY, AND RESIL-  
IENCE ACROSS THE  
CHINESE DIASPORA**

## JULY

UT CONNEWITZ PHOTO CREW

Part of a series of public events that highlights everyday resilience in Chinatowns around the world. Mei Lum, Diane Wong and Huiying Bernice Chan have spent the past several years conducting ethnographic research and oral history interviews from New York to Johannesburg.  
*WING ON WO & CO.*  
26 Mott St., Mnhn

**FRI JULY 20**

7:30PM–10:30PM • FREE  
MUSIC: ANOUSHKA SHANKAR/  
MY BRIGHTEST DIAMOND  
Melding Indian raga with  
electronica beats, sitar mas-  
ter Anoushka Shankar honor's  
tradition while boldly embracing  
the future. She is joined by indie  
singer and composer Shara Nova.  
*BRIC CELEBRATE BROOKLYN  
FESTIVAL*  
141 Prospect Park W., Mnhn

**SAT JULY 21**

11AM–6PM • \$20  
MARKET: A MIDSUMMER ODDI-  
TIES FLEA MARKET  
Feast your eyes on medical  
history ephemera, anatomical  
curiosities, natural history items,  
and osteological specimens.  
*BROOKLYN BAZAAR*  
150 Greenpoint Ave., Bklyn

**SAT JULY 21**

2PM–6PM • FREE  
FUNDRAISER: MEOWMANIA

**2018! A CAT PARTY IN BROOKLYN**

Cats. They conquered the internet, now they are coming for Brooklyn. Pet them, take selfies with them, have a drink with them, admire their exquisite beauty. Drink proceeds go to local rescues.  
*PINE BOX ROCK SHOP*  
12 Grattan St., Bklyn

**SUN JULY 22**

7PM–9:30PM • FREE  
BOOK LAUNCH: FIREBRAND  
FEMINISM: THE RADICAL LIVES  
OF TI-GRACE ATKINSON, KATHIE  
SARACHILD, ROXANNE DUN-  
BAR-ORTIZ & DANA DENSMORE  
Breanne Fahs will read from her  
new book followed by a discus-  
sion of radical feminist tactics  
and activism in today's political  
climate.  
*BLUESTOCKINGS BOOKSTORE*  
172 Allen St., Mnhn

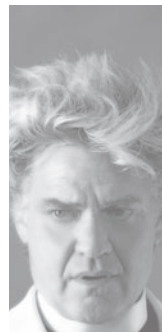
**TUE JULY 24**

7:30PM–10PM • FREE  
MUSIC/FILM: RZA: LIVE FROM  
THE 36TH CHAMBER OF SHAOLIN  
Wu-Tang Clan founder RZA deliv-  
ers an epic audiovisual film expe-  
rience — a re-score of the Shaw  
Brothers' 1978 martial arts classic  
The 36th Chamber of Shaolin.  
With its themes of perseverance,  
transcendence and brotherhood,  
the film was a formative influence  
on Wu-Tang's aesthetic. Now,



YUVAL HEN/DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON

## IN THIS ISSUE



May 2018 THE INDEPENDENT

TED RALL



IMMIGRATION





# BATTLE OF THE GRIFTERS

## DISGRACED BROOKLYN PARTY BOSS REGAINS INFLUENCE

BY THEODORE HAMM

“**H**e’s retired, out of politics,” says Brooklyn district leader Geoffrey Davis regarding former Democratic party boss Clarence Norman. But then again, Davis adds, “Does anyone ever really retire?”

Since his return from prison in 2011, Norman has indeed steadily reasserted his influence. Starting with Ken Thompson’s successful 2013 effort to topple his nemesis, District Attorney Joe Hynes, Norman has played a key role in local elections. This past May, Norman effectively chose the Brooklyn party’s candidate for surrogate court judge on this fall’s ballot.

Judge selection may sound not like a consequential move, but backing candidates is one of the party organization’s main functions. And picking judges has been a primary concern of the current Democratic boss, Frank Seddio.

Norman went to prison because of a slew of campaign violations including extortion in civil court judge campaigns. His return to backstage influence raises important questions about the future of Brooklyn’s Democratic Party. That’s especially the case because many insiders predict that Norman, via his ties to the ascendant Hakeem Jeffries wing of the party, will exert plenty of influence when it comes to choosing Seddio’s successor.

• • •

FOR VARIOUS COUNTY PARTY ORGANIZATIONS, the local courthouses function like a Tammany Hall patronage mill, albeit for white-collar types. Queens Democratic boss Joe Crowley, for example, has long ensured that his cronies control that county’s surrogate court, where unclaimed estates serve as a piggy bank for connected lawyers. Crowley’s consigliere, Gerard Sweeney, reportedly collected more than \$30 million from 2006-2016 for his work “administering” the estates of people who died without heirs.

The civil branch of Queens Supreme Court that Crowley and Sweeney run is considered by many to be a “foreclosure mill.” Frank Seddio, whose law firm represents lenders[1], has been trying to help Brooklyn’s civil Supreme Court match that rep.[2] Two judges who have worked on behalf of borrowers have both fallen out with Seddio (and as a result, both were smeared in the New York Post).[3] In her federal lawsuit against Seddio, former judge Laura Jacobson alleges that the party boss helped ensure that a former bank attorney would oversee the accelerated foreclosure process in Brooklyn.

During Norman’s reign in the 1990s-early 2000s as party leader, several Brooklyn judges

he helped elect found themselves in the headlines, although not because they were fighting on behalf of the little guy. One Kings County Supreme Court judge accepted cash as well as cigars and rum in exchange for favorable divorce proceedings; another was caught taking \$18,000 in unmarked bills in court. Meanwhile, one of Norman’s surrogate court judges, Michael Feinberg, steered millions in excessive legal fees to a longtime colleague. After Feinberg was forced out, his replacement was none other than Frank Seddio, who resigned two years later amid allegations that he funneled campaign money to his inner circle. [4]

In 2003, Hynes began to investigate Norman, his former ally, for allegedly “selling judgeships.” The editorial boards and Mayor Bloomberg cheered on Hynes’ crusade, although many insiders suspect that the DA was motivated mainly by his anger at Norman because he felt that the party boss didn’t work hard enough for him to squash Sandra Roper’s upstart 2001 campaign vs. Hynes. Between 2005-2007, Brooklyn prosecutors—led by Hynes hatchet man Mike Vecchione—brought four trials against Norman. After scoring various convictions for minimal campaign infractions, in the final trial Vecchione nailed Norman for forcing civil court judge candidates to pay his preferred consultants.

Late in his ill-fated bid to fend off Ken Thompson’s 2013 bid to unseat him, Hynes began warning of Norman’s role in helping Thompson’s campaign. But the charge didn’t help the six-term incumbent, whose tenure was marked a large number of wrongful convictions. In last year’s race, Norman—via his longtime ally, political consultant Musa Moore—initially supported Patricia Gatling, one of the two black candidates in the race. After first pocketing between \$18-30k from Gatling, Moore then began to work for Eric Gonzalez, pocketing another \$30k from the eventual winner. Such handiwork puts the former party boss on better terms with the current DA.

• • •

WHILE NORMAN HAS MOSTLY operated behind the scenes, his name surfaced in the headlines last year during the Bedford Armory controversy. BFC Partners, the project’s developer, pledged at least \$500k to the Local Development Corporation of Crown Heights that Norman oversees. Norman was allied with Laurie Cumbo in her reelection bid last year against Ede Fox, who made the Armory a central issue. Critics of the project fear that it will only contribute to the area’s gentrification, but political players gain far more by working closely with developers than against them.

The transfer of properties at Surrogate Court also can accelerate gentrification. Norman’s

pick for that position, Civil Court Judge Harriet Thompson, has been part of a team of Brooklyn judges tasked with reducing the backlog of foreclosure cases in Brooklyn. While Thompson reportedly closed nearly 400 cases in 2017,[5] whether she did so on terms favorable to lenders or borrowers is not clear. Her actions in such proceedings would be fair game if she faced a competitor in the race, however.

But at the moment, Thompson has no challenger. According to veteran Brooklyn political consultant Gary Tilzer, who has managed several successful campaigns by judge candidates not backed by the party, the uncontested race is part of a larger trend. “The reform political clubs in Brooklyn no longer care about challenging the machine,” laments Tilzer. “And the courthouse is the lifeblood of the party.”

One reform-oriented group that is calling attention to party decision-making, New Kings Democrats, recently was accused of “political gentrification” by a handful of black district leaders. NKD is organizing a “Rep Your Block” campaign aimed at expanding membership in the party committee. “We’re trying to do basic things like get open agendas for the committee meetings, yet we’re seen as the enemy,” says NKD president Brandon West.

District leaders appear to fear that NKD’s effort could eventually undermine their current power to pick the next party leader. Norman, among others, is taking a keen interest in who that figure will be. The current favorite is Walter Mosley, who occupies the Clinton Hill assembly seat formerly held by his mentor, Hakeem Jeffries. Mosley has made no secret of his interest in becoming the next party boss—and the only question is whether he will challenge Seddio this September or two years from now.

Mosley’s ascension would expand Jeffries’s control over the party, and Norman has longstanding ties to Mosley too. Seddio’s base is in South Brooklyn but he’s also close to Borough President Eric Adams as well as Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats and other political clubs. Yet other than control over the courthouses, ballots and other turf, it’s not clear what any of the factions of the Brooklyn Democratic Party actually stand for.

What is clear that Clarence Norman, still only 66 years old, shows no signs of retiring anytime soon.



ASAF SHALEV

BY GEORGIA KROMREI

In a rent-controlled apartment on the first floor of 231 E. 117th St., Andre Calderon is sweltering. The temperature in his home has averaged 85°F since mid-May.

“I have to keep the door open,” he says. “What a way to live. I can’t turn the A/C on with the heat because it will get the walls wet.”

When Calderon first called 311 to complain he was told the city does not take complaints for too much heat until June 1. A few weeks and several additional phone calls later, his radiator is still hot to the touch.

Since the investment firm Emerald Equity bought 231 E. 117th St. and 46 other East Harlem buildings in December 2016 — the “Dawnay Day portfolio” — the tenants have experienced badly deteriorating living conditions, coupled with offers to pay them to leave. According to city Department of Housing Preservation and Development records, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of complaints about lead paint, mold, pests, and lack of cooking gas and heat. At a joint meeting of the tenants’ associations from 105 E. 117th and 231 E. 117th in March, resident after resident spoke about their children getting rashes from lead dust, periods without cooking gas, infestations of cockroaches and rats, and a desperate need for repairs.

“Do they think that because we are Spanish we are stupid?” Aracelia Gines asked. “That we do not know our rights?”

Meanwhile, ArchRock, the building’s management company, has been aggressively offering tenants cash buyouts, hastily renovating vacated apartments, and renting them out for as much as three times what the old residents were paying.

This pattern is all too typical of how loopholes in the city and state rent-regulation laws give landlords an incentive to drive out rent-controlled and rent-stabilized tenants out and move wealthier, market-rate renters in. The state’s 1997 weakening of the laws let landlords charge an automatic 20% rent increase whenever a tenant moves out, and enabled them to deregulate vacant apartments once their rent got high enough. The state’s minimal enforcement of its laws against illegal overcharges has enabled owners to deregulate thousands of apartments illegally.

The state’s rent-stabilization laws, which protect an estimated two million rent-stabilized tenants in New York and its suburbs, will expire in June 2019. Tenant advocates are urging the state legislature to repeal vacancy decontrol and the automatic vacancy bonus, and tighten limits on how much landlords can raise rents for renovations. The Assembly has passed such measures several times, but in the state Senate, they have been blocked by an alliance of Republicans and renegade Democrats, with the tacit support of Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

The Brookfield Properties hedge fund, which loaned Emerald Equity \$300 million to buy the Dawnay Day portfolio, has so far contributed \$150,000 to Cuomo’s

2018 re-election campaign, through three separate limited-liability corporations.

Crystal Vizcaíno, a community organizer with the Urban Housing Assistance Board (UHAB), says 105 E. 117th St. has the worst living conditions she has seen in her career. When she visited Lucy Delemaco, a homebound 93-year-old Cuban-born tenant who has lived in her rent-controlled apartment since 1946, she found “conditions that were so bad, her home attendant could no longer care for her,” said Vizcaíno. “The windows were open in the winter because the smell of mold was so strong. The only source of heat in the apartment was the stove. There were five holes in her ceiling, and her apartment had not been renovated since the 1970s. Emerald Equity knew how she was living.”

Delemaco and 12 other members of the building’s tenant association signed a petition calling for Emerald Equity to make repairs. Vizcaíno delivered it to the company on January 10. Emerald did not respond. Two weeks later, HPD placed 105 E. 117th into the Alternative Enforcement Program, a citywide list of 250 buildings the agency categorizes as “severely distressed.”

UHAB was hired by Manhattan Legal Services to organize tenants in Emerald Equity buildings in East Harlem. They were able to finance it because the City Council approved increased funding to help tenants in disputes with their landlords last November, a concession granted for supporting the upzoning of East Harlem.

Tenants also got a boost from The Independent. Our February feature article on tenant organizing at 231 E. 117th was distributed in other Emerald Equity-owned buildings and also translated into Spanish and made available online. They are now organizing in six Emerald buildings.

Management has sought to evade the protests. In February, ArchRock told tenants at 231 E. 117th that its office on East 115th Street had moved, and that if they had any complaints, they would have to send them to a post office box in Brooklyn. The tenants later discovered that ArchRock had relocated the office to a space a block further east on East 117th Street, where the street-level windows are covered with thick black paint and employees come in and out through an unmarked cellar door.

“Of course they don’t want us to know where the office is,” says 231 E. 117th resident Maria Miranda. “They don’t want to see me in their office complaining anymore.”

Miranda, 63, suffers from asthma, and breathing in dust from her unrepaired bathroom has sent her to the emergency room twice this year. Yet she has played a leading role in the tenant organizing drive.

Stopping at every flight to catch her breath, she slowly climbed the stairs of 322 E. 117th St. in March. On the top floor, nearly all of the apartments were empty and in the process of being renovated. The sole remaining tenant said he was leaving at the end of the month. He

Continued on page 15

# ONE WOMAN'S STRUGGLE

## WITH HER HUSBAND IN DETENTION, AN UNDOCUMENTED HONDURAN MOTHER OF THREE TRIES TO TRIES TO HOLD HER FAMILY TOGETHER IN THE TRUMP ERA

BY ERIN SHERIDAN

In late 2005, Ana, a Honduran woman in her mid-twenties, stood looking at the rubber rim of a tire on the edge of the Rio Grande, just across from the U.S. border. The smuggler she had paid to escort her and her five-year-old son from Tegucigalpa had just asked her to take her clothes off. Wary of getting undressed in front of a stranger, she refused. The coyote responded, “Then, you’re going to get wet.”

“OK, then I will get wet,” she said to him before lying down in the tire with her son, Michael, in her arms. The man stripped down, climbed into the water, and pulled the two across the flowing river and into the United States.

Thirteen years later, Ana, a pseudonym she requested for fear of retaliation, now 39, is still undocumented, but has two U.S.-born daughters who are citizens. She has seen her husband, Juan, deported once—which got her and the children evicted, leaving them homeless—and detained three times, most recently for five months earlier this year. Michael, now 19, is allowed to stay temporarily under the Deferred Access for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, and supports the entire family by running his father’s beverage-delivery business while he was locked up.

Ana remembers the silence on the bank of the Rio Grande that day in 2005. It was two in the afternoon. There were no helicopters, no Border Patrol agents ready to place her under arrest.

“I thought, they have to know that people are passing,” she recalls.

The coyote instructed her to walk toward a U.S. Customs and Border Patrol outpost. There, she surrendered to an agent who drove her to an office, sat her down in air-conditioned room, and stared into her eyes for a quarter of an hour without speaking.

“He told me, ‘You are so — sinvergüenza.’ You have no shame, you should be ashamed of yourself. He told me in Spanish. He said, ‘How did you come here? Why are you here? And you had the audacity to bring this little boy here?’”

Eventually, a female agent walked in, asked to take over the case, and began asking Ana routine questions. She was taken to a shelter with her son, put on a bus with \$60, and sent to meet Juan, who had arrived several months prior. She did not speak English.

Had Ana crossed into the United States in 2018, she and her son would likely have been separated. In April, the Trump administration decided it would prosecute all people crossing the border without visas on criminal charges, instead of civil charges, and jail them if they did not return immediately. Their children, who could not legally

be detained in adult jails, were held in separate facilities if they were not claimed by someone who could prove they were a relative.

In Honduras, Ana and her husband had managed to get by. She worked three jobs, and Juan ran his own business. But life in Tegucigalpa got increasingly dangerous as gang violence escalated. Gang members gave Ana’s brother-in-law, a police officer, a beating as a warning. The family began receiving death threats.

“Over there, in the neighborhood that we are from, you can’t wear your preference of the sport team you like if the gang is against it,” she says. “You can’t wear some types of shoes if they don’t like it. It’s horrible.”

The couple moved to Costa Rica after the birth of their daughter, but left after she died. They were too devastated to focus on running their business, so they returned to Honduras, where the threats began again.

“We couldn’t make it anymore. We didn’t realize,” Ana says. “And we weren’t paying attention to our son. He was staying with my mother-in-law. We realized we were depressed. That’s why we decided to come.”

In the United States, the couple had another daughter, now 10 — but Ana and the children became homeless after Juan was seized by immigration agents in 2009.

“The next day, my landlord came up and told me, ‘You have to leave the apartment because you won’t be able to pay,’” she says. “My husband had just paid rent recently. I got so scared, and my husband was telling me, ‘You have to get out of there because they are going to come and get you.’”

“I found myself with my children outside in the snow. At night. So I went to the train.”

Juan was deported to Honduras. He left Ana an emergency fund, which she gave to the pastor at her church for safekeeping. She went back to work as a housekeeper, and took refuge with the children in a city shelter. Juan got more death threats in Honduras, so he spent the family’s savings hiring a coyote to come back to the United States.

“After my husband came, we left the shelter and we started again,” Ana says. But in 2013, Juan was detained for a second time. His lawyer was able to get him released on humanitarian grounds, with an order of supervision. That meant he had to check in with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) every six months.

After Donald Trump became President, their lawyer warned that Juan was likely to be deported. “I started to get anxiety, real anxiety,” Ana says. “My husband started to work more. He was getting skinny, his eyes were really red because he just worked. You know why? Because he wanted to save money. He was thinking, ‘If something

happens to me, I want to help my family.’ He didn’t want us to be homeless like before.”

In January, Juan was arrested by ICE when he checked in. He was detained at the Hudson County Correctional Facility in Kearny, New Jersey, one of three major ICE-maintained detention centers in the state.

The Hudson County jail has housed detained immigrants since the mid-1990s. A 2016 report by Detention Watch documented an overall “poor quality of life” as well as lack of adequate access to medical care and legal assistance.

It costs prisoners around \$1 to make a phone call for 18-19 minutes. If Juan needs extra food, clothes, or toiletries, Ana has to either buy them through the jail commissary or send him money. Juan got a job inside the jail cleaning bathrooms, but quit after he was paid only \$1 a day.

Michael has put off plans to go to college. He has taken over Juan’s beverage-delivery business and is working 17-hour days to support the family.

“He says, ‘Mami, my father hasn’t done nothing bad.’ He repeats that, a lot. He told me three days ago, ‘I can’t, I’m tired. This is so hard.’”

On the evening of Juan’s arrest, Ana told her two young daughters that he had driven to another state to visit a friend. Her 10-year-old, however, quickly caught on. Several days later, she asked Ana if she was getting a divorce. “I thought, ‘Oh my god, this is the time,’” recalls Ana.

“When I said, ‘Mami, you remember, that Papi was going to that big office downtown?’ Because one day we came and waited, he went inside, and he came out with his permit when he was under that order of supervision.

“And she said, ‘Oh — so you mean that when Trump came in he made that order and he changed it?’ She’s a very articulate and strong 10-year-old and when she says it she looks in your eyes... ‘I hate him. Why is he doing that? That’s not fair.’”

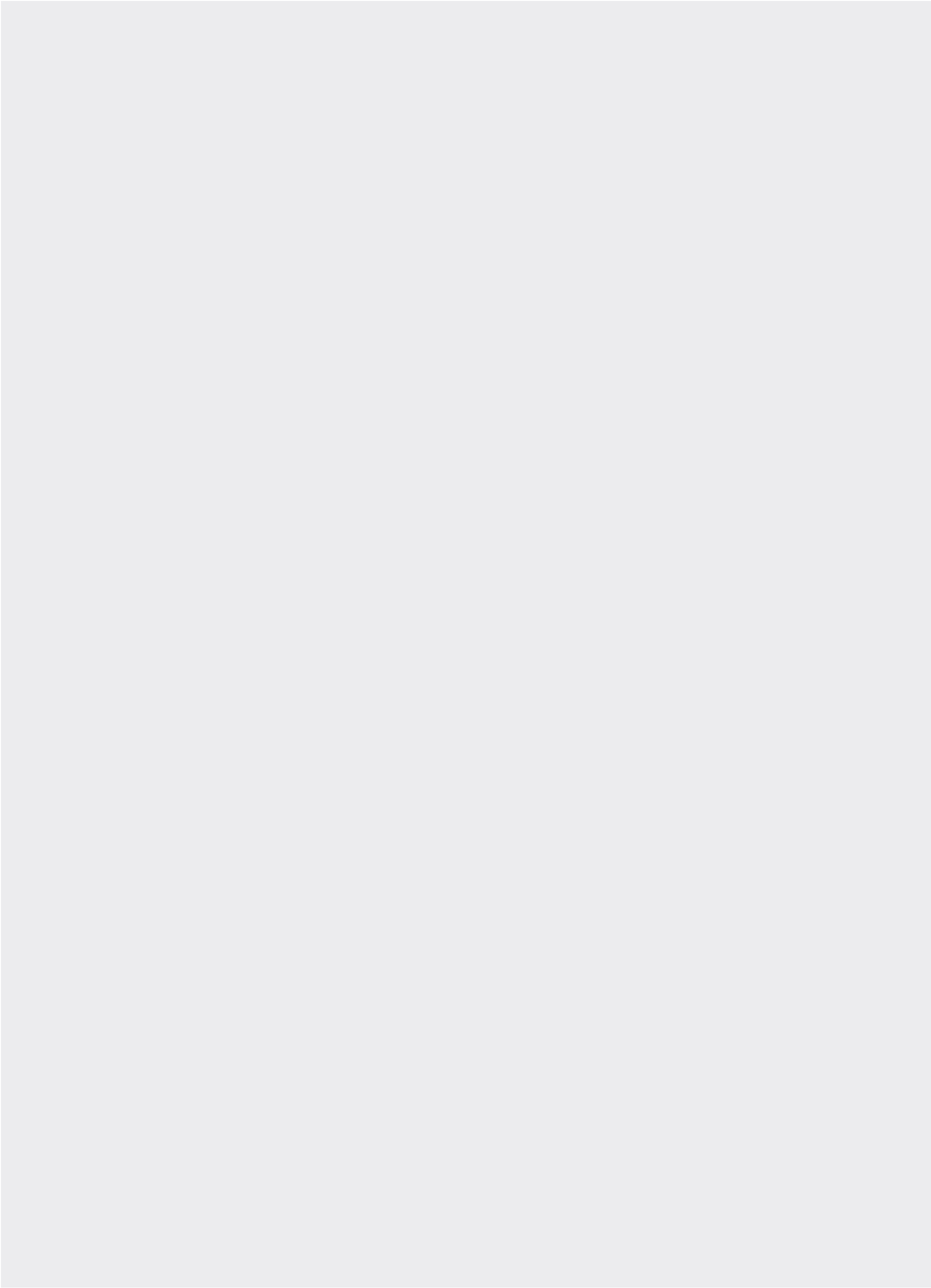
Ana’s younger daughter, 5 years old, doesn’t understand why her father is absent. “Sometimes she tells me, ‘Give me my Papi.’ And I tell her that he’s going to come soon. I don’t know that if it’s because she feels that because of me he’s not there.”

Ana recently graduated from community college with honors. She was ineligible for financial aid because she’s undocumented, but the school gave her scholarships to help her finish. She also couldn’t complete an internship at a local hospital because she does not have a Social Security number.

Michael has expressed interest in studying business. Ana hopes to continue her education to become a nutritionist and get an M.S. and PhD. “In

*Continued on page 15*









# IN PALESTINE, GO TO HOSPITAL, GO TO JAIL

BY JACLYNN ASHLY

**M**ohammad Abu Habsah, 18 years old, spent nearly two weeks at a hospital in Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank after Israeli forces shot him with live ammunition during protests three years ago. Bullets fired by an Israeli sniper struck him in both legs as he attempted to run away after clashes broke out between Palestinian demonstrators and the Israeli army.

Other protesters carried Abu Habsah, then 15, away, bringing him to the Arab Rehabilitation Hospital in northern Bethlehem, where he received treatment for 12 days. The day he was released from the hospital after undergoing surgery, Israeli forces raided his home in Bethlehem's Dheisheh refugee camp.

It was 3 a.m.

Abu Habsah recalls being awoken by an Israeli army commander, who squeezed his leg directly in the location of one of his bullet wounds while he was sleeping in his bed. The soldiers refused to allow Abu Habsah to take his crutches or his medicine with him, the teen said. "One of the soldiers carried me over his shoulder for a few minutes. Then he just dropped me and I fell to the ground. I kept telling them to help me, but the soldiers ignored me. I was forced to limp by myself."

The Palestinian youth was handcuffed, blindfolded and driven away in a jeep. Owing to his injuries, the soldiers brought him to an Israeli military hospital where staff gave the injured teen aspirin and wrapped a bandage around one of his wounds before transferring him to an interrogation center in Gush Etzion — an Israeli settlement bloc in the occupied West Bank built in violation of international law.

There, Abu Habsah was interrogated for almost two weeks. "I was in so much pain at the time," he told The Independent. "They kept asking me about my injuries and where I sustained them."

Yet before his captors even examined him, Abu Habsah says they knew the details of his injuries: "They even knew the exact locations where I had been shot."

Dawoud Yusef, the advocacy coordinator for the Palestinian prisoners' rights group, Addameer, says Abu Habsah's experiences are common among Palestinians in the occupied West Bank. During protests or clashes, mostly young Palestinians pelt rocks and the occasional Molotov cocktail at Israeli soldiers, who shoot tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition at the protesters.

Palestinians are often arrested by Israeli forces after sustaining injuries during protests and Israeli authorities collect intelligence on Palestinians who seek medical treatment, often with the cooperation of members of Palestinian society who

collaborate with Israeli authorities for a host of reasons.

"The fact that Palestinians are injured is taken most often by the Israeli army as a de facto admission of guilt," Yusef told The Indy. "The fact that you have been hit by a rubber bullet or live ammunition means you must have been present at the protests."

However, rubber bullets and live ammunition are often used by Israel as a means of crowd dispersal. Therefore, many bystanders can also be injured and fall onto Israel's radar when seeking medical assistance. Israeli authorities have also been known to withhold medical treatment from injured detainees in order to use it as leverage to coerce Palestinians into cooperating during interrogations, Yusef said.

During his 18-day detention, prison officials did not change Abu Habsah's bandages, causing his wound to become infected. Then, three days after he was released from custody, Israeli forces raided the Dheisheh camp — a near nightly occurrence in the West Bank — and released live ammunition on its residents. He was shot again in his left leg.

Abu Habsah, who was forced to dropout of school owing to his injuries, says many of his friends are reluctant to seek treatment for wounds sustained by Israeli forces, fearing that they too will become the target of arrest.

He is just one of the countless young Palestinians in the Dheisheh camp who have been injured, arrested or killed by Israel.

When Jihan Shamroukh's son, Raghad, was shot in the leg by Israeli forces three years ago during a predawn raid into Dheisheh, he was taken to Jerusalem's Hadassah Medical Center nine miles away. The 19-year-old spent a month handcuffed to a hospital bed. Upon his release, Israeli soldiers told the teen that he would be permitted to return to his home in Dheisheh, but once he was healed they would come to arrest him, according to Jihan's recollection.

Raghad began to slowly heal, she said, making his way from the bed to crutches. But as he got better, his family knew the day that Israeli forces would arrest him was approaching closer.

"Each night, we would all wear our day clothes, in case the soldiers came," Jihan told The Indy as she clutched a photo of Raghad in her hands. "Before Raghad would sleep, he would place his boots beside his bed. He thought at any moment the soldiers would come to take him."

A year after the teen was injured, the Israeli forces finally came. Conducting an overnight raid, they ransacked Raghad's room and said they had found pieces of weapons — an allegation Raghad, now 22, and his family vehemently deny. He has since been held in Israel's Ofer detention center near Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, and in

May was charged with illegally possessing weapons and was sentenced to three years in prison.

In prison, he continues to suffer from his injuries, his mother says, explaining that one of the nails that doctors inserted into his leg to hold it together has broken. Her son needs treatment in order to fix it but prison officials have refused to transfer Raghad to a hospital.

"He is still recovering," his mother says. "It's very difficult for him to balance and he falls over a lot. His body is still sensitive and weak."

Yet while Jihan constantly worries about her son's condition in Israeli prison, she feels grateful that he is still breathing. Raghad's friend, 21-year-old Raed al-Salhi, was shot multiple times during an Israeli army raid in 2016 and succumbed to his wounds a month later.

"Raed was like a son to me," she said, glancing at Raghad's photograph. "When he was killed I cried so hard for him and his family. I thank God that my son will be able to return home one day, but for Raed and others who have been killed, they will never be able to come back to their families. The suffering never stops here."

An Israeli army spokesperson denied the allegations raised in this article.



# WILL THE TRUMP/KIM BROMANCE MAKE THE WORLD SAFER?

BY MARK HAIM

Donald Trump's boosters are still cheering his nuclear summit with Kim Jong-Un. Some are even talking about a Nobel Peace Prize. Many Democrats, on the other hand, are calling Trump out for, as they see it, giving away the store. They argue that he gave Kim credibility and a long-sought cancellation of war games on the North's border while essentially offering nothing more than a vague promise to "denuclearize" — whatever that means — at some uncertain time in the future.

The U.S. peace movement has for decades worked to free the world of the scourge of nuclear weapons but has profoundly disagreed with the Trump administration on almost every front. Can, or should, peace advocates and their progressive allies support Trump's supposed détente with the North? Moreover, should they support denuclearization if it only entails North Korea surrendering its modest arsenal, when the movement has, for decades, demanded that nukes be abolished, mutually, verifiably and universally? And, as always, there is the question of how we get from here to there.

Consider: Our government and those of other nuclear-armed states are universally opposed to nuclear proliferation — the spread of atomic weapons to currently non-nuclear states — but have been steadfastly opposed to giving up their own nuclear capabilities. When the so-called "Ban Treaty," which would outlaw all nuclear weapons, came before the United Nations last summer, 123 nations supported it (out of 178), but not one of the nine nuclear-armed states got on board.

It is also worthy of note that the United States is legally bound by the Non-Proliferation Treaty, signed in 1968 and ratified in 1970. Ratified treaties are, under the U.S. Constitution, deemed "the highest law of the land," but our government consistently ignores Article VI, which reads:

*Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.*

The United States, however, has not taken the treaty seriously, except to use it to pressure non-nuclear states. In fact, through its periodic "nuclear posture reviews," it has made clear its intention to maintain a nuclear arsenal in perpetuity. And our government has adopted a \$1.2 trillion plan to "modernize" its

nuclear-weapons capabilities. These actions are fueling a new arms race with Russia and China. This is very costly, dangerous and completely unnecessary.

And this "do as I say, not as I do" double standard creates an incentive for non-nuclear states to develop weapons and obtain a deterrent to discourage aggression like the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 or the U.S.-led NATO assault on Libya in 2011. Both of these regime-change wars have devastated the countries they ostensibly were out to help and left them embroiled in violent internal conflict to this day.

## NORTH KOREA IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It also might help to recall that as many as three million North Koreans were killed in the 1950-53 Korean War, about 20 percent of the population. The United States dropped more than half a million tons of bombs on the North, as well as napalm. As Air Force General Curtis LeMay, head of the Strategic Air Command during the Korean War, put it, "We went over there and fought the war and eventually burned down every town in North Korea."

Almost no North Korean family went unscathed, and this helps explain their animosity towards and fear of the United States. It also helps to understand why they find the huge U.S.-South Korean war games right on their doorstep as threatening. It is always possible that, under the pretense of an exercise, their adversaries could launch a surprise attack.

## TRUMP ON KOREA

Donald Trump's foreign policy has ranged from erratic, at best, to very destructive. He has pulled the United States out of the Paris climate accord and the Iran nuclear agreement, two important steps forward undertaken under President Barack Obama. And, in moving the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, he has inflamed the Israel-Palestine conflict even further. He has insulted foreign leaders, including major U.S. allies, while heaping high praise on brutal despots. He's continued and expanded current wars and threatened new ones. And it seems like he sees one of his main jobs on the world stage as being an arms salesman, hawking the wares of the military-industrial complex hither and yon.

Perhaps the most disconcerting moments of his presidency came in his war of words with North Korea in 2017. He threatened that the North Koreans "will be met with fire and the fury like the world has never seen," and tauntingly dismissed Kim Jong-Un as "little rocket man" and "a sick puppy." He not only threatened to unleash a nuclear attack that would "totally destroy North Korea," but in an adolescent (and cartoonishly symbolic) outburst he stated "I too

have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!"

Measured against the pushing-to-the-brink-of-nuclear-war position we were in in 2017, Trump's current diplomacy with North Korea is a big improvement. Even if the results of their summit were more photo-op than substance, it is far better to be sitting down and talking, than it is to be threatening what should be unthinkable, launching a nuclear war.

The joint statement signed at the end of the summit is quite vague. It includes a pledge that the "DPRK commits to work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," but there is no explanation as to what "complete denuclearization" means, on what timeline it would be attained or how it would be verified. There is also no indication whether "complete denuclearization" includes the removal of nuclear-armed U.S. military forces from South Korea or the waters surrounding Korea. As such, this is pretty hollow rhetoric. But hollow rhetoric is an improvement over bellicose rhetoric.

Trump has also come in for significant criticism for "giving without getting." It is noted that he agreed to cancel U.S.-South Korean joint military exercises with no corresponding concession by the North Koreans. In point of fact, these exercises, or war games, should never have been held in the first place. As Trump noted, they are "provocative." Mobilizing tens of thousands of troops, on land, in the air and on the sea and staging mock invasions close to the border of another country is clearly unacceptable, and, due to the ambiguous nature of the mobilization, could easily be suspected of providing cover for an actual military assault. Imagine how the United States would have reacted during the Cold War if Cuba and the Soviet Union held similar exercises off the coast of Florida.

## WHAT DO THE KOREAN PEOPLE WANT?

While it is hard to know what the people of North Korea want, as it is not an open society, we know from multiple polls that the overwhelming majority of South Koreans want an end to the tensions, a peace treaty ending the Korean War, mutual recognition and steps toward disarmament. In fact, a recent poll indicated that 88 percent of South Koreans support the April 27 Panmunjom Declaration, which calls for peace between the two Koreas and steps toward disarmament. Their wishes seem to dovetail with those of many in the Korean diaspora, which were laid out in a pre-summit statement of unity by Korean-Americans and allies.

Will North Korea disarm? Time will tell. But it is, of course, not just up to the North Korean leadership. A lot depends upon how they perceive the intentions

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# HER TRUTH

BY CAMILLE MAY BAKER

In 2009, the singer-songwriter Shea Diamond was released after serving a 10-year sentence at a series of men's prisons in Michigan for armed robbery. She committed the robbery, she says, in order to procure funds for a gender-affirming surgery.

Diamond (whose first name is pronounced "SHE-uh") has come a long way since then. Her first EP, *Seen It All* (Asylum Records) was produced by songwriter Justin Tranter who has worked with Justin Bieber, Linkin Park and Gwen Stefani among others and is due out June 29. The first single from the record, a sexy-soulful-amplified take on colorism, "Keisha Complexion," was released in May.

*The Independent* reached Diamond by phone in Los Angeles where she now lives. We discussed her new EP and her experiences as a transgender woman in prison where she wrote her first song, a somber and probing anthem about femininity and tackling adversity, "I Am Her."

**THE INDYPENDENT:** *You talk about how you've always identified as female, even when you were a child. I read that your mother used to whisper in your ear as you were singing in the church choir that your voice was too high. What's your relationship to music like?*

**SHEA DIAMOND:** For me, music is the essence. It's just as close to me as my breath. And so the music to me was just like the thing that saved my life. If I wasn't able to hum, if I wasn't able to sing little notes, I don't know if I would be able to have made it through those rough times. Sometimes I needed to sing myself to sleep. When I was incarcerated, that was a very difficult moment for me and I needed some additional strength.

*It seems like that's where you really began to come into your own as an artist.*

I began to actually write more aggressively. I began to write down my feelings about the church, about my sexuality, about my identity — just about everything in life. And just about experiences I had in relationships and all that stuff. I started to figure out how to make the best version of a song I could, not having any idea of structure.

*It must have been a challenge being a trans woman in a men's prison.*

And I began to be punished within the system for my femininity. What happens inside is you introduce a trans woman into a masculine world. Being that you hold the secondary feminine sexual characteristics of a male female, that presents a security issue. You become a threat to the safety of the institution. So they don't want you on the compound — they don't want you to come outside. So a lot of times they punish you by keeping you on "TOP/LOP" a lot. They have you in protective segregation. Your femininity is always under attack.

I would come into certain facilities and tone down my femininity. I made sure I didn't have any homemade makeup on, made sure my breasts didn't stand out too much, made sure my

hips didn't stand out too much. I wore glasses that made me look a little bit more androgynous.

If I dressed as my truth, I would get stopped on the bus on the way to transferring to the new facility. The wardens themselves would come out and say, "No, you're not coming to my facility." It's the most humiliating and degrading. You're handcuffed. And then get there, and to be rejected and told "You're too feminine. You're a man, as we want you to clearly identify yourself as, but you don't look the part. So we cannot have you interrupting the normal operations of this place."

It was a double-edged sword. There was no way for you to win.

*To what extent were you able to make music while you were incarcerated?*

For me, music was my escape. They give me my TOP/LOP for nothing. They thought I was crazy. I was singing and writing songs and stuff. They put me in segregation — I was still smiling when I came out. I found a joy in everything. When I was in segregation, I found acoustics. Although I couldn't see anybody, they could hear me. So I was able to sing "I Am Her." So I had the inmates in there singing "I Am Her." It was like a party up in there. I would lay on the floor and sing. You know, it took away the hours that you spent in there, the days you spent in there, the months that you spent in there. To the point that you lost sight of the calendar days.

*So you have an EP coming out June 29, "Seen It All."*

I'm so excited! It has a lot of good beats and stuff that the people who are behind the music have thrown in there. It's like a little bit of everything. There's just, like, a special bit of love in the project, just some extra magic that was added.

*Tell us about your first single off the record. What was the genesis behind it?*

"Keisha Complexion" is glorifying the dark complexion. The forgotten-about complexion. For so long, access to the world of beauty has only been available to light skin. So "Keisha Complexion" is revamping the word "ebony" and giving a twist to the words "ebony complexion."

There has been like a bit of a backlash from "Keisha Complexion," which is very surprising. The backlash that comes is: "Is that a man?" So, I would just like to address that once and for all.

Trans people are who they say they are. Why would you be so rude, why would you be so malicious, as to call a woman wearing a dress, calling herself "her" — her pronouns being "she" and "her" — why would you wait to call her "female"? Now that I'm living my truth, now why am I a man?

*This interview has been lightly edited for clarity and concision.*



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hadn't had gas for months and was tired of cooking on a hotplate. Tenants in multiple ArchRock-Emerald Equity buildings in East Harlem described similar efforts to get them out. The strategy appears to be two-pronged: render living conditions unbearable, and then offer them buyouts or relocation to Emerald Equity properties in the Bronx or Yonkers. From 2014 to 2016, before Emerald Equity acquired the Dawnay Day buildings, HPD filed 36 lawsuits demanding that their owners make repairs or correct violations. The department has since filed 74 such suits, more than twice as many, against Emerald. In April, reporters confronted an ArchRock employee outside its East Harlem office, asking him about the status

of the 17 HPD lawsuits still pending. "Which lawsuit?" the man, dressed in slacks, loafers, a crisp blue dress shirt, and a Bluetooth headset, responded, telling the reporters they could expect a call from "the guy you met on the street" before he disappeared into the cellar. Repeatedly asking a tenant to leave their home after they have declined a buyout, or trying to buy tenants out without a formal written offer, are both illegal. But it is a tactic that often works, is highly profitable when it does, and poses a problem for tenant organizers who can't keep pace with the buyout mill. "The same person has knocked on my door six times since Christmas, offering me money, or the Bronx," said Edgar Gonzaga, 32, who has lived at 322 East 117th all his life. He pointed at gaping holes in his floor and ceiling where a gas pipe was installed after the gas line broke, leaving he and his family unable to cook. "They're trying to make us miserable," he said. "They know if they renovated this apartment,

they could get \$3,000 a month. I pay \$1,068." María Martínez accepted \$22,000 to leave the one-bedroom apartment in East Harlem that has been her home for 18 years. She said the last straw was when ArchRock told her that the rent would increase from \$1,392 to \$1,500. If Emerald Equity can rent it to a new tenant for \$3,000, it would recoup the \$22,000 it spent buying her out in about 14 months. Martínez says she would have rather have stayed in her apartment, "with my friends nearby," but she moved to Pennsylvania with her husband and daughter in May. "They're emptying the buildings faster than we can organize them," says Crystal Vizcaíno.

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summer, what I'm planning to do is buy the books for microbiology and another sort of biology class — to start to read and learn the material and do something in my free time. If I've got some," she says. But she needs financial aid, and the family's economic status depends on whether Juan can stay in the U.S. He was released from detention in early June, but his future is uncertain. "Sometimes I feel so depressed, but then I remind myself that I'm fortunate as a mother, as a student, as a wife," Ana says. "I can't give up. Because if I give up, my whole family falls. It's a lot of pressure. If

you ask me, my health is really, really bad." "It's important to speak up — what's happening and how we suffer, so that maybe people can understand the realities of these communities," she continues. "We can't stay quiet, we can't stop moving. We have to move. We have to do something. That's why I have decided to tell my story." *Note: Shortly before The Indy went to press, Ana's husband Juan was released from detention but will have to reappear in court. He returned to work the next day. Their son Michael will be able to attend his first semester of college.*

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of the United States. They would clearly be more likely to make moves in that direction if they saw a de-escalation of tensions and U.S. moves toward making peace. On the other hand, seeing the United States reject other agreements, including the Iran nuclear agreement and the Paris climate accords, does not help. If Donald Trump really wants a Nobel Peace Prize, he will clearly have to do more than just have one meeting gushing praise on an autocratic leader. The

United States will have to do its part to create an atmosphere of mutual trust. And liberals and those on the left, while standing firm against Trump's overall agenda, need to recognize that, just as a stopped clock tells the right time a couple of times a day, some of Trump's actions could be worth applauding. Bernie Sanders gets this, and in a prepared statement, while noting it was "very light on substance," he declared the Singapore meeting "a positive step in de-escalating tensions between our countries, addressing the threat of North Korea's nuclear weapons and mov-

ing toward a more peaceful future." He further stated, "Congress has a key role to play in making sure this is a meaningful process, not just a series of photo ops." If you agree, please urge others to support steps to peace. *Mark Haim is a longtime advocate for peace, justice, sustainability and climate action. He serves as director of Mid-Missouri Peace-works, a grassroots activist group.*



# KAYFABE NATION

BY PHILIP YIANNPOULOS

It's Saturday night inside a Knights of Columbus event hall in Ridgefield Park, New Jersey and the Dagger Mik Drake is here to wrestle. Various colored paper streamers and fishing line — decorations from parties past — dangle from the ceiling. In the center of the room, a freshly assembled 15-square-foot wrestling ring quietly waits to be relevant. The black fiber ropes that surround it are taut, ready for performers to cling to them as if for their very lives.

Around the room devotees clump together, some wearing T-shirts supporting The Ugly Ducklings, The Fraternity, or Danny Moff — some of the crowd's favorites. A concession booth runs business in one corner of the hall. Its menu, scrawled in a sidwinding hand, offers offers potato chips, pretzels and pink hot dogs served on Bunny Bread buns. A man with a goatee changes seats a few times and eventually settles on a spot that will later force him to whisk his small son out of the aerial path of what may be an Abercrombie and Fitch model in bright purple spandex. The Pabst Blue Ribbon knocked over in the process only adds to the excitement.

Some fans have zealously followed the melodrama of the Battle Club Pro league and its earlier incarnations for decades. They cheer and boo the cultural descendants of circus folk and competitive brawlers that created America's unique pastime of "sports entertainment." The rest of us are just catching up.

When the The Dagger takes the ring for his part in a three-way free-for-all, he sports only gold lamé briefs and matching knee pads above his shiny white boots. After every dropkick, he falls as a horizontal line — his body just faster than his mane of tight-curved hair, which drops like a Cousin Itt with muscles regularly treated with L'Oréal Sublime Bronzer. His entire 246-pound body slams against one inch of foam padding above a bed of two-by-twelve wooden planks that span structural iron trusses. He continues wrestling through a bloody nose.

"Am I screwin' up by not going down the, you know, General Life 101 path?" The Dagger, who has been wrestling for twelve years and working as lawyer for nine, muses later. Yet such doubts pass quickly. His environmental law job in Manhattan serves only as a safety net, something to support him until he makes it to the big time: World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc (WWE).

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MODERN PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING began to coalesce in America when the Civil War forced men of different backgrounds into military camps around the country. The bivouac tedium punctuated by hunger, disease, death and gambling led to the competitions and, in effect, the melding of fighting styles. Thus met the tripping maneuvers of the Vermonters, the free-for-all and its nasty, Western Frontier rough-and-tumble cousin, the classical Greco-Roman, the innovative Cornish side-hold, the gentlemanly antebellum upright and the Irish collar-and-elbow.

As the initial democratic system of fighters competing essentially at random failed to draw audiences, a need for larger-than-life characters arose. Showmanship, more than ability, sold seats. That could mean having an enormous or deformed physical presence, charisma to rival Casanova or enough Bible recall to impress the masses. And what's a hero without a villain? Beginning in the 1880s, as wrestling evolved from the travelling carnival scene, promoters discovered melodramatic feuds were the most dependable way to sell tickets. Of those narratives, the most marketable was whatever form of xenophobia was en vogue at the time. Racism worked, too.

This model, a century later, led to creations like The Iron Sheik in 1980 — just months after the Iranian hostage crisis — and his nemesis, Sergeant Slaughter, a balding cross between Smokey the Bear and the drill instructor from Full Metal Jacket. The Sheik was a popular love-to-hate heel, directed to stir up anti-Iranian sentiment. During a 1984 match between the

two rivals in Madison Square Garden, patriotic chants of U-S-A! U-S-A! erupted throughout the venue. Twenty-nine years later, in that same arena, Donald Trump was inducted into the pro-wrestling Hall of Fame, smiling amid a torrent of boos. Five years after that, the same U-S-A chant that once greeted Sergeant Slaughter rang through the halls of Congress during Trump's first State of The Union address.

To date, the current lonely behemoth in televised wrestling, WWE, still builds characters up just to tear them down. The Mexicools ride to matches on lawnmowers while Cryme Tyme, two black guys who steal stuff from other wrestlers, exist to "parody racial stereotypes," according to their website. But such parodies exist because there is a market for them, a market exploited by Trump when he carved a path to the White House by describing Mexican immigrants as murderers and rapists and tweeting out fake black-on-white crime statistics.

• • •

"THE BEST CHARACTER is the one that is yourself, but with the volume turned up," Mik Drake explains with hard-earned wrestling-world wisdom.

There's a word for this: Kayfabe. It defines wrestling's brand of suspension of disbelief, the protection of both melodramatic narratives and the physical moves that create the fighting illusion.

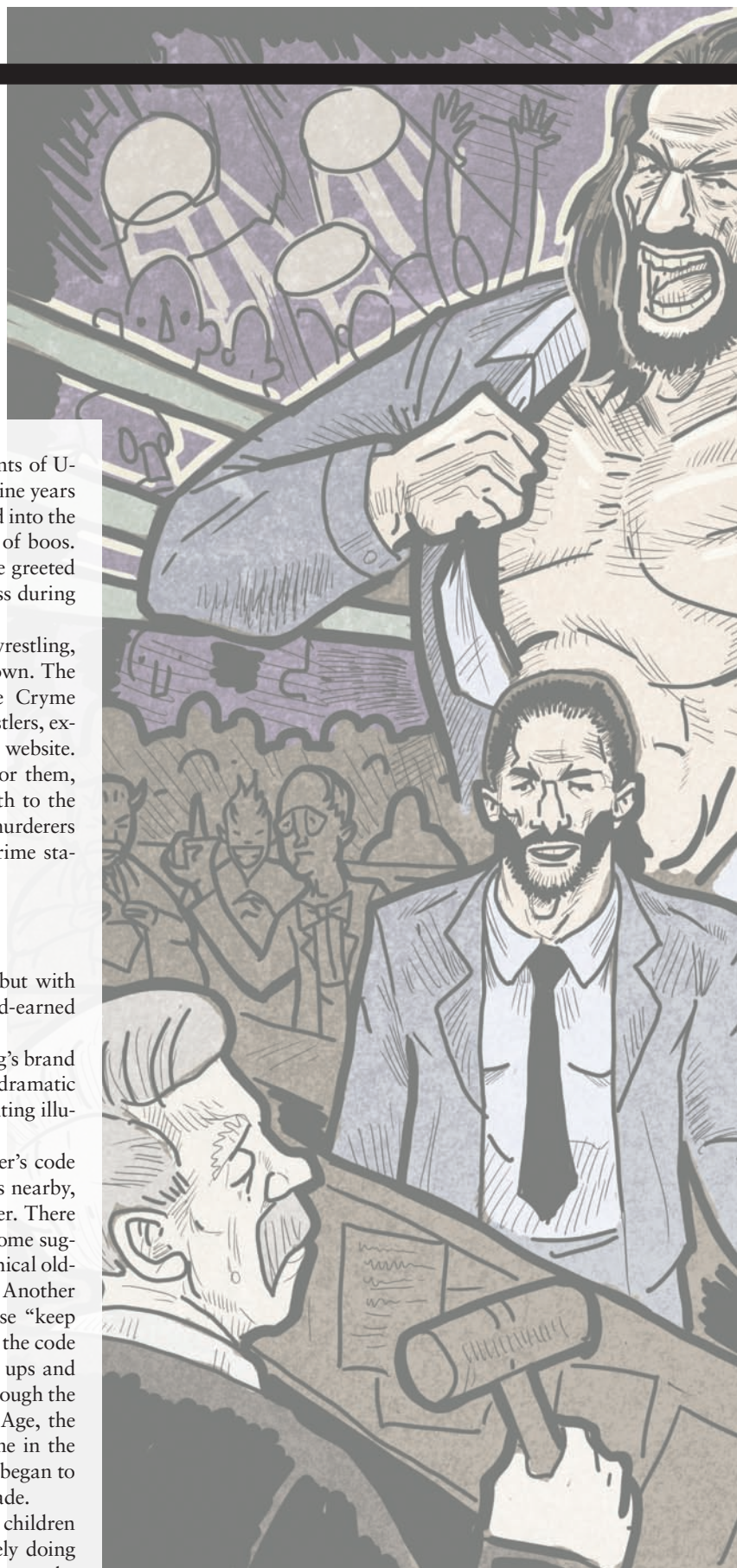
In the early days, Kayfabe was the carnival worker's code word for when a mark, a member of the crowd, was nearby, warning off-duty wrestlers to hop back into character. There are numerous theories regarding the word's origin. Some suggest it is a portmanteau homage to Kay Fabian, a mythical old-time wrestler who may or may not have ever existed. Another theory states the term derives from the British phrase "keep cavey," or be on the lookout. Regardless of its origin, the code survived through a century of American wrestling's ups and downs, its vagabond circus days, meager turnouts through the Great Depression, the subsequent post-war Golden Age, the televised oversaturation that led to the sport's decline in the 1960s and early '70s and its rebirth when the WWE began to monopolize the national market in the following decade.

During the Vietnam era, when America watched its children slaughtered in the jungles of Vietnam (and alternately doing the slaughtering), wrestling performers and fans began the sustained wink that carries through to today. The intention behind Kayfabe morphed from protecting industry secrets into a tacit agreement between audience and performer that artifice spawned from even the smallest kernel of truth is more entertaining than reality. The public's appetite for a story grew with its ability to bite into it. Superstar Hulk Hogan, for instance, boasts a ten-inch penis, yet the endowment of the man who portrays him, Terry Bollea, admitted to being more modest in nature before a judge.

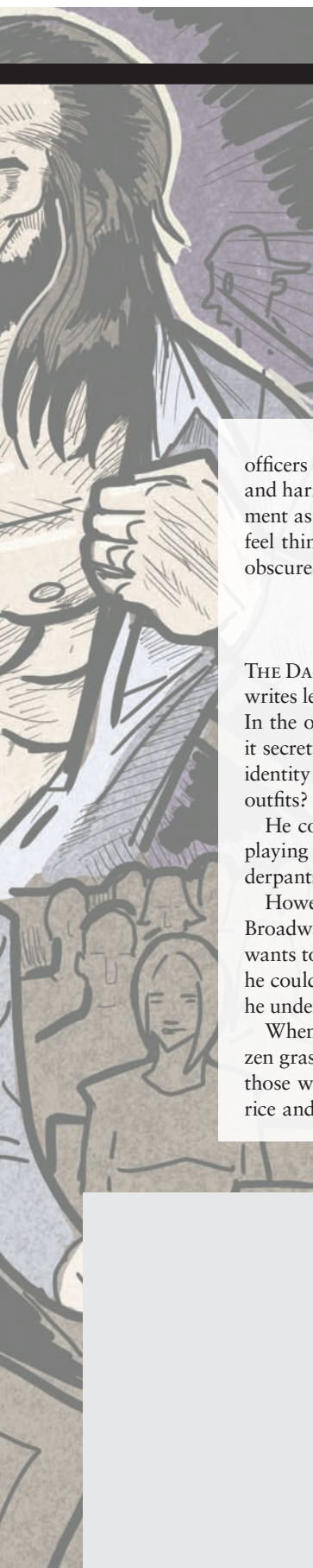
With everyone in on the game, pointing out non-sequiturs and logical plot holes equates to narrative murder. In the wrestling universe, individuals have gone through extreme lengths to protect kayfabe. Take, for instance, Nelson Scott Simpson's years-long dedication to his character "The Russian Nightmare," Nikita Koloff, that involved legally changing his name and hiring an "interpreter" to translate his remarks when he spoke in public. (Simpson was born in Minnesota.)

Likewise, today, our political moment craves melodrama. Talking heads speculate on the next act of porn stars and former FBI directors. We don't want facts but moral conclusions. Fans of the president crave a 1,933 mile-long wall that would cost billions of dollars — passionately arguing for it while aware that it will probably never happen. Kayfabe guides our current age of political amusement but wrestling fans were there first, perennially happy to find a reason to pull their hair out and shout "how could he do that?"

Yet, while parallels abound between wrestling and politics, one defines itself as entertainment and the other currently only acts as such. Fans of wrestling are lawyers, journalists, police







officers — citizens on all sides of the political spectrum. They are fans because it's fun and harmless entertainment. But things get murkier when we begin treating entertainment as real and the real as a imaginary. In this moment, when people yell until they feel things are true, swapping truth for kayfabe passion, it is easy for the real to be obscured behind spectacle.

• • •

THE DAGGER MIK DRAKE wears a suit to work at his environmental law firm where he writes legal briefs on a computer that runs on a buggy version of Microsoft Windows. In the office, none of The Dagger's coworkers know about his double life. He keeps it secret to avoid the headache of questions he's faced before when word of his other identity spread around previous office water coolers: Hey, so where do you get the little outfits? How do those boots feel? So when am I going to see you on TV?

He compares his love of wrestling to his colleagues' weekend hobbies like acting, playing soccer, writing poems. "It just so happens that this one involves me in my underpants, jumping around and fake fighting other grown men," he says.

However, as far as The Dagger sees it, no one else in the office aspires to be on Broadway, win the World Cup or a Nobel prize for Literature — not in the way he wants to be a professional wrestler. He recently turned down a promotion at work so he could keep up with his workouts and the related cryotherapy and sports massages he undergoes to stay in shape.

When The Dagger enters Trader Joe's in Manhattan he makes a b-line for the frozen grass-fed beef burgers and Jasmine white rice, ignoring creative displays aimed at those with a desire for flavor before fuel. Two tupperwares each with 400 grams of rice and 200 grams of cut-up patties are his only daily intake, with the exception of

a post-workout protein shake. The Dagger rarely goes out on dates and never drinks alcohol. He is cultivating his inner wrestling self — uber competitive, "almost to a sociopathic level," he says.

After the Battle Club Pro match, The Dagger arrives home to his tiny, shared apartment in Manhattan. He turns on the TV and reviews tape of his performance so he can get better and eventually make it to the WWE. He's been in talks with them, the leader of the wrestling world, but nothing has been inked yet. It's only a matter of time, he believes. If not the WWE, perhaps he can make it big in the All Japan Pro Wrestling league. "Wrestling is unlike other sports," he says. "You tend to peak later, 35 to 40, think back to, like, Hulk Hogan."

The Dagger eventually lies down on the futon he uses for a bed in the living room that doubles as a kitchen. The room around him is sparse, its white walls mostly barren. A poster of Rocky Balboa triumphantly raising his fist in the air hangs across the room from his bed. This is a place of transition — why would The Dagger spend time decorating when he could be leaving for Florida or Tokyo or Los Angeles any day now?

If asked about the bruises and cuts on his face at the office on Monday, he has a go-to response ready. "I'm in a fight club, like in the movie, but I can't talk about it," he'll say, then add with a laugh, "It's from pickup basketball." He is happy to let them choose the truth that suits them.



# GOING UP & DOWN IN NEW YORK CITY

*What Goes Up, The Right  
and Wrongs to the City*  
BY MICHAEL SORKIN  
VERSO BOOKS 2018

*Building & Dwelling*  
BY RICHARD SENNETT  
FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX  
2018

By Bennett Baumer

New Yorkers dislike many things. Subway delays. That smell during summer. But what New Yorkers really dislike is real-estate development.

That new building either blocks your view, gentrifies the block or brings those people to the neighborhood. Two new books on architecture and urban studies make the case for sustainable real-estate development.

City University of New York Spitzer School of Architecture professor Michael Sorkin’s *What Goes Up* is a series of pithy and piquant essays on the twin problems facing New York and many other large cities: affordability and climate change.

Self-styled progressive Mayor Bill de Blasio won election in 2013 on a “Tale of Two Cities” campaign and central to his election and re-election was his affordable-housing plan. The mayor’s ten-year plan to create and preserve 200,000 “high-quality, affordable homes” is his administration’s legacy project; he updated the goal to 300,000 units in late 2017. The plan depends on enticing private real-estate developers to opt into inclusionary zoning bonuses (greater density in exchange for some permanent affordable units) and billions in public and quasi-public money in low-interest loans to construct or renovate affordable housing. The plan, in theory, would provide housing for over half a million people, as many as now live in public housing or receive Section 8 rental assistance.

In his essay “Ups and Downs,” Sorkin lauds de Blasio’s plan, but laments that the burden to produce and preserve housing falls on cities, as decades of conservative federal power has greatly diminished public housing funding. Also, he adds, “there’s a huge elephant in the room, which is the possibility – indeed, probability – that even with the complete success of [de Blasio’s plan], the net number of affordable housing units in the city will fall, and substantially.” The city government has to work against both right-wing attacks on public housing and the state’s slow phaseout of rent regulations. It does not set the federal housing budget or have power over the rent laws. That leaves a city mayor with only zoning incentives and municipal money to entice affordable-housing pro-

duction. Sorkin proposes Jane Jacobs-style “incremental change, community participation... infrastructures of all kinds, and design.”

Buildings are the largest source of greenhouse gas pollution in New York City, comprising 67 percent of total emissions. *What Goes Up* argues for requiring carbon neutrality, outlawing oil-fired boilers and vastly reducing traffic. The city already bans No. 6 oil in boilers and plans to phase out No. 4 oil by 2030, but many landlords will just switch to natural gas – another fossil fuel. Sorkin thinks deeply about architecture and design – weaving hot takes on new buildings; he likes the Oculus but says it cost too much – but would do better to think about the environmental effects of building operations, such as how we will heat and cool spaces. In writing about Hurricane Sandy, Sorkin recognizes “real but painfully slow” progress on greening buildings, but warns that we may “wind up so many Canutes, bashing away with our feeble swords at the relentlessly rising seas.”

*What Goes Up* cites urbanist Jane Jacobs and makes the requisite White Horse Tavern reference, but Columbia’s Center on Capitalism and Society senior fellow Richard Sennett’s new book, *Building and Dwelling*, gives a fuller treatment of Jacobs’ ideas.

Sennett’s urban landscape is composed of the ville (the built environment) and cité (city living). He posits that these two concepts became divorced, creating closed cities marked by the dominance of vehicles, segregation, regimentation and control. *Building and Dwelling* seeks ways to open cities. Most people know the story of Jane Jacobs’ criticism of Robert Moses’ mega-planning schemes, but Sennett is more interested in the rivalry between Jacobs and mid-century socialist architectural critic Lewis Mumford. Jacobs championed local decision-making, gradual development, “eyes on the street” to combat crime, and spontaneous street life her in beloved low-rise Greenwich Village. Mumford thought that stressing local decision-making and action could not address the scale of New York City, as infrastructure projects that affect the entire city need more than a “bottom-up, cellular framework.” He argued for garden cities and democratic-socialist planning for all aspects of people’s lives (health, shelter and work).

*Building and Dwelling* can at times be opaque, and perhaps even “incoherent,” as Sennett himself has acknowledged. The author writes of the flaneur meandering through a city taking it all in, and at times the book meanders. He does, however, address the long-term threat of climate change — and warns against what he calls “stoicism of the bad sort, i.e. try nothing because nothing can be done.”

# REVEREND BILLY’S TRUMP HELP HOTLINE

# THE BOYS ARE BACK ON BROADWAY

*The Boys in the Band*  
BOOTH THEATRE (222 WEST 45TH ST.)  
THROUGH AUGUST 11

By Gena Hymowech

When *The Boys in the Band* premiered off-Broadway in 1968, it was cutting edge, a realistic look at gay men written by a gay man. As Paul Rudnick put it in the documentary *Making the Boys*, “This play opened at a time when everything was still taboo.” It became a smash hit, but as Michael Musto noted in that same doc, the movie suffered from bad timing. By 1970, Stonewall had happened, and modern gay men could no longer relate.

So why revive it? Well, for one, it’s a great history lesson, and for another, so many of its themes have no sell-by date: the pressure to be beautiful, self-harm, unrequited love, polyamory, addiction, suicide, the importance of friends when you’re queer. How queers socialize, how we define ourselves, and how we listen to music have changed — and we have rights that would have seemed unthinkable 50 years ago — yet people will always be people.

I’ve seen the film and love its humor, emotion, story and acting. I didn’t even think about how negative it made gays look until more recently. I see it as a work about a particular time and a particular group of people. These men are not supposed to stand in for every gay man. If you are the kind of person who expects each gay film to act as a protest for gay rights, then, yeah, you may not like it. If you lived in a pre-Stonewall world, or have just dealt with a lot of homophobic crap in your life, then, yeah, you might feel triggered, understandably. I personally don’t think these characters are evil, and I don’t think every representation of us has to be perfect. That being said, *Boys* can be uncomfortable to watch in 2018 — the amount of shame some of these men feel and the way Michael takes his anger out are admittedly just awful.

The revival stars Jim Parsons, Andrew Rannells, Zachary Quinto, Matt Bomer, Charlie Carver, Robin de Jesús, Brian Hutchison, Michael Benjamin Washington and Tuc Watkins. This new cast is out, and can be so without risking losing their careers. The main challenge for them is understanding the mood of 1968, and connecting with the play’s spirit. Oh, and it would be nice if they could make it their own, too.

The plot? Friends are meeting at an apartment to celebrate a character’s birthday when all emotional hell breaks

loose. They were Michael (Parsons), uptight, newly sober; Emory (de Jesús), an effeminate sort; Bernard (Washington), the only black character, whose humor and lightheartedness cover up his sadness and vulnerability; Hank (Watkins), who left his wife; Larry (Rannells), Hank’s lover; Donald (Bomer), Michael’s loyal, neurotic friend; Cowboy (Carver), a prostitute bought for the birthday boy; Harold (Quinto), the birthday boy, “a 32-year-old ugly, pockmarked, Jew fairy”; and Alan (Hutchison), a supposedly straight friend of Michael’s.

Sadly, I never felt like the actors were totally inhabiting these well-written roles. Quinto has the unenviable task of playing a character once played by the great Leonard Frey, an actor who almost totally dominated the original movie — he was a bitchy presence you couldn’t help but love (or at least I couldn’t). Harold is Michael’s conscience and emotional babysitter; he takes a perverse pleasure in kicking Michael while he’s down. But Quinto plays him like he wouldn’t hurt a soul. During the play, Harold gets high, and Quinto takes that direction too much to heart, removing the crispness from the role. He’s got the sarcasm down, but his emotional distance weakens the character. His Harold could take or leave what is happening, and his angry speech to Michael at the end — the beating heart of this whole play — falls flat on its face.

I thought Parsons was an excellent choice for Michael, because who is Big Bang’s Sheldon if not a straight Michael? He at times evokes who Michael is, and adds a new layer of geekiness (no surprise there), but he’s just not as uptight as the character demands, and like Quinto, he’s too nice. His evolution into a monster is hard to believe. Emory’s intense annoyance provided comic relief when expressed by Cliff Gorman. His anger at Alan served as a weapon against that character’s hypocrisy. In this version, we don’t see a really pissed-off Emory. And when you have a softer Michael, Emory and Harold, you lose a giant chunk of that pre-Stonewall pressure-cooker feel.

Hutchison is missing that haunted look the original Alan (Peter White) had, the one that showed how frightened he likely was of his gay feelings. On the positive front, he gives Alan an interesting aggressiveness that one might interpret as a protective mask, so no one thinks he’s queer. I was really pleased with Rannells — he’s got a gift for physical comedy, and is a more fun Larry than Keith Prentice was. Washington has more charisma than the original Bernard, too, and plays him in such a way that you feel he has added

self-esteem. Bomer, Carver and Watkins sort of fade into the background.

I have a feeling with increased rehearsal time and better direction, this version of *Boys* could have been something special that resonated with a new generation. Unfortunately, like the 1970 film, it’s out of tune, albeit for a different reason.

